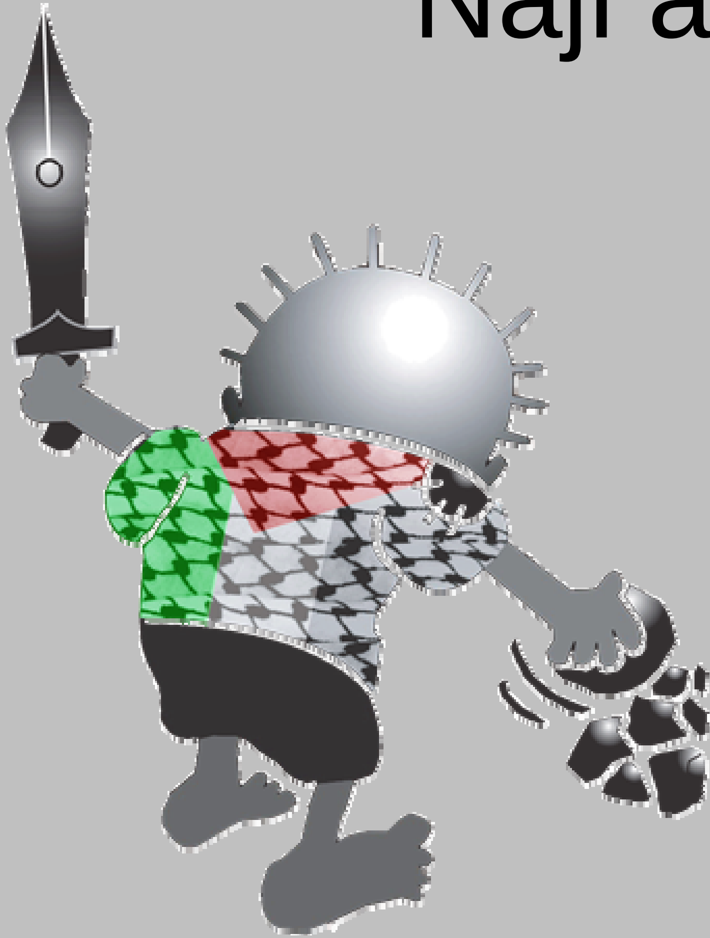
The Cartoons of Naji al-Ali:





Characters, Symbols, and Relevance

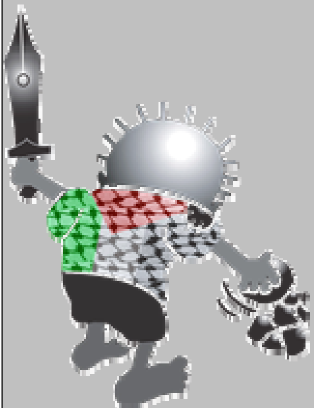
by Fayeq Oweis

Love for the First Home



Sign: Ein Al-Hilwa Refugee Camp

Tent: One may get acquainted with so many homes, but longing will always be for the first one.



Democracy in the Arab World

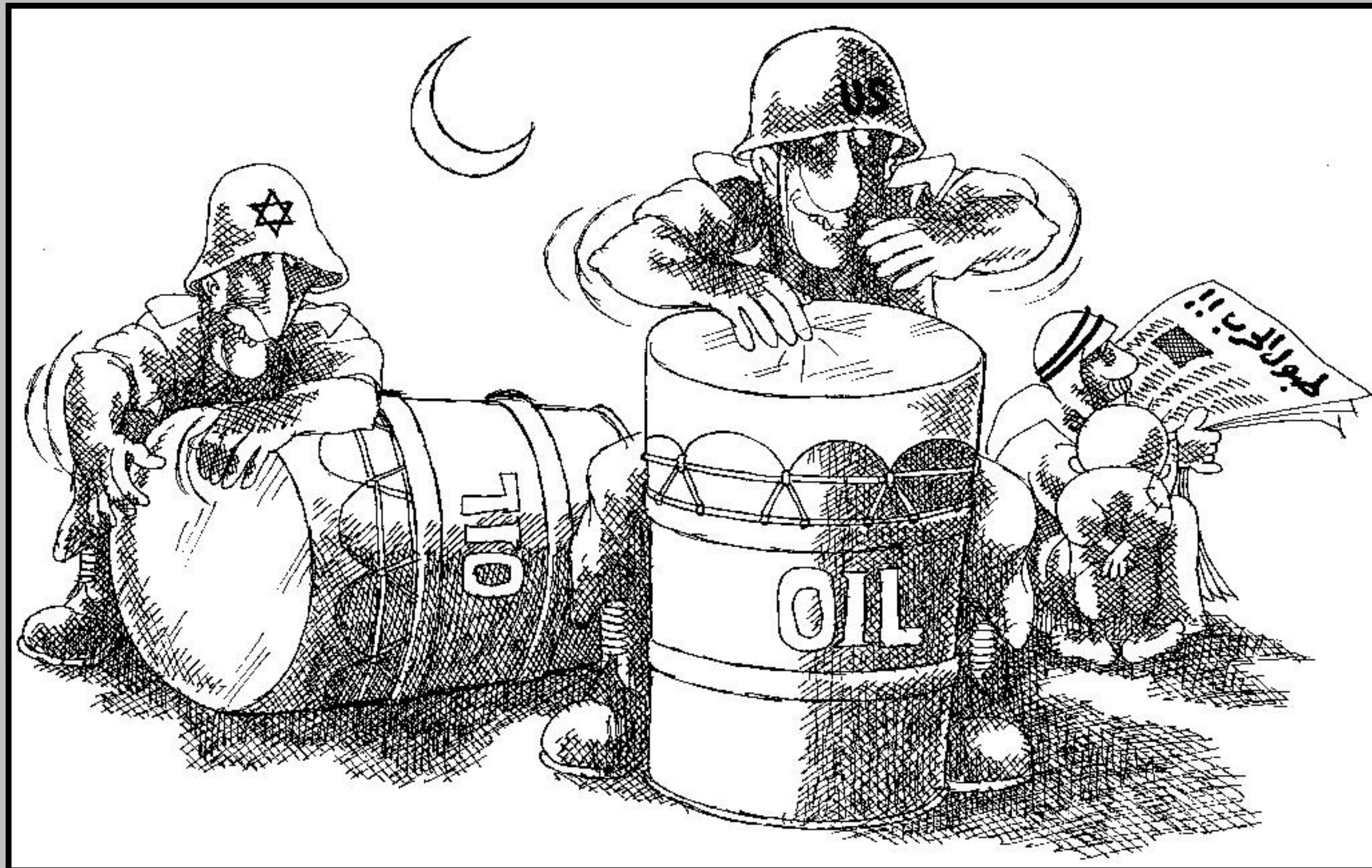


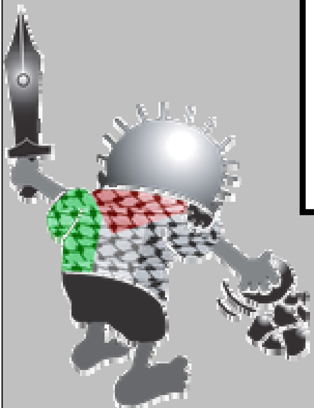
Handala (boy): I was very pleased with your article today about democracy… what are you writing for tomorrow?

Man: I am writing my will.



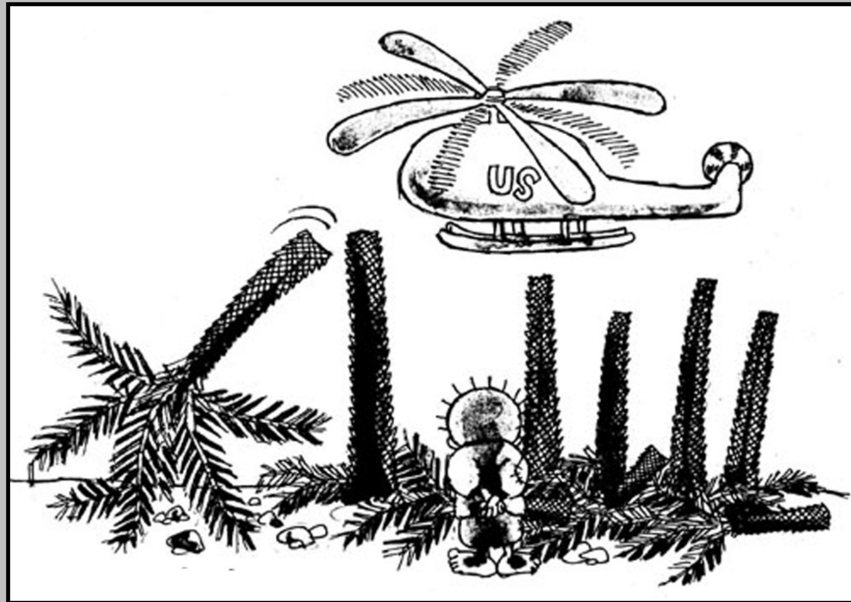
The Oil Drums of War

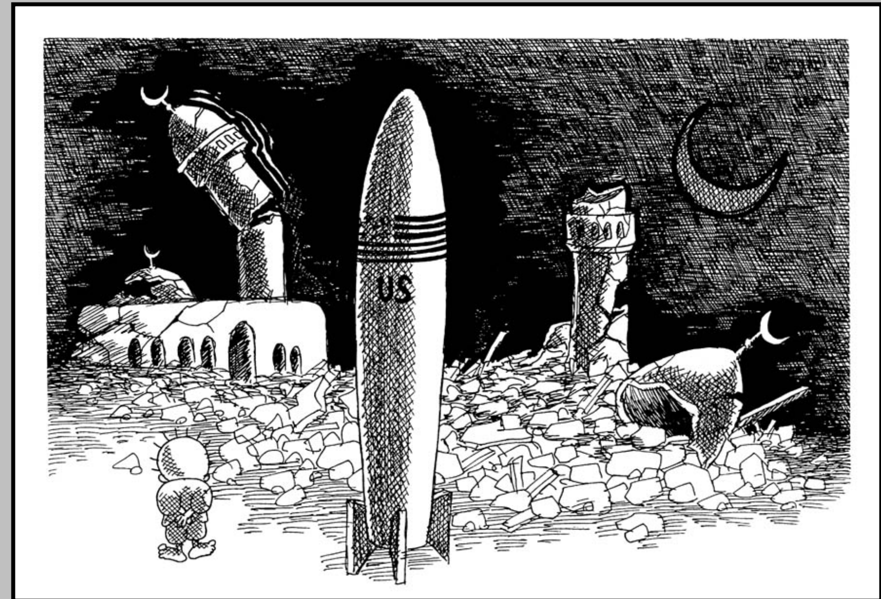




Newspaper Title: Drums of War

US Involvement in the Arab World







Freedom of Expression





Man: leave the laundry, get up fast… get the kids outside and let them play and make noise… close the door and windows… I want to say down with the US and I am afraid if someone hears me, you will become a widow.

Arab Governments Disputes

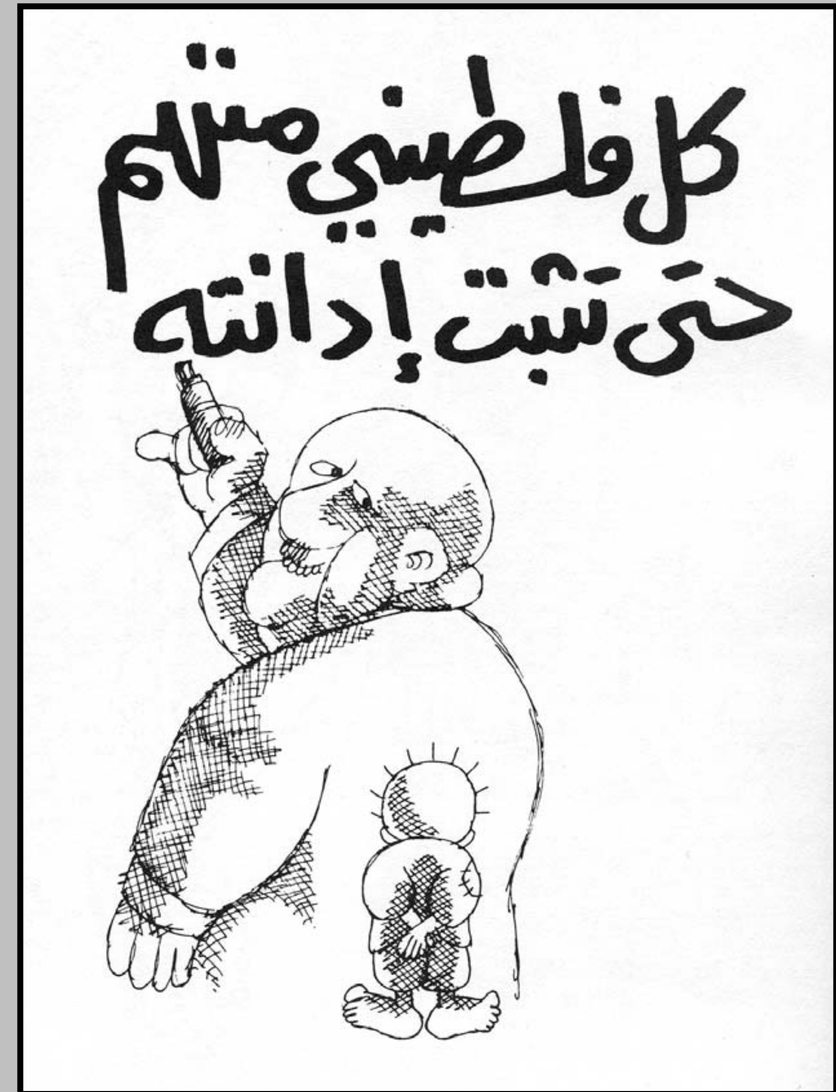


Directional signs: To the right: America. To the left: United States



“Every Palestinian is a Suspect Until Proven Guilty”

The Evil Man





Who is Naji Al-Ali?



- Born 1937 in *Al-Shajara*, Palestine
- Forced to leave in 1948 with his family
- Settled in *Ein Al-Hilwa* refugee camp
- Joined the Arab Nationalist Movement in 1959
- Ghassan Kanafani published his cartoons in *al-Hurriya*, 1961
- In 1963 went to Kuwait and introduced Handala in 1969
- In 1971 went back to Beirut, worked for *al-Safeer*
- Published his first cartoon book in 1976
- Forced to leave Beirut in 1983, went to Kuwait and worked for *al-Qabas* newspaper
- In 1985 he was forced to leave Kuwait to London
- In 1987 he was assassinated in London at age 50.



What they said about Naji Al-Ali

- *"if you want to know what the Arabs think of the U.S., look at Naji Al-Ali's cartoons"*

  New York Times



- *"this man draws with human bones"*

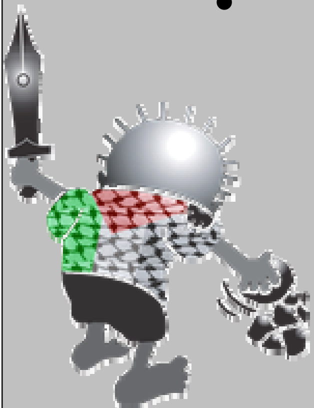
  Times Magazine

- *"Naji Al-Ali draws with phosphoric acid"*

  Japan Asahi Newspaper

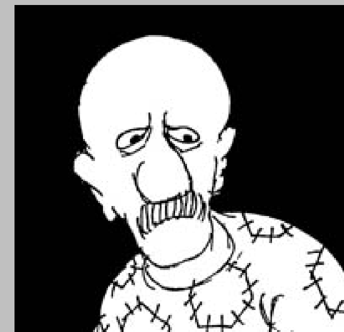
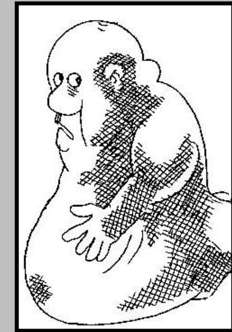
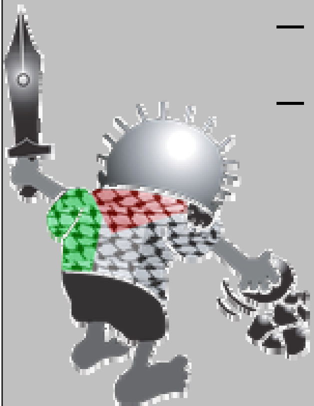
- *"one of the best cartoonist since the 18th century"*

  International Federation of Newspaper Publishers and awarded him the Golden Pen Award in 1988



Cartoons for Ordinary People:

- Naji's Cartoons were Simple, clear, and easy to understand
- They speak to and for ordinary Arab people.
- The cartoons represented life on a stage in **Black & White**, with characters playing the contradictions between:
  - Good vs. Evil
  - Beautiful vs. Ugly
  - Poor vs. Rich
  - Justice vs. injustice
  - Strong vs. weak
  - Sacrifice vs. Sell out

The Subjects of the Cartoons:

Political Cartoons:

- **Palestine:** The Occupation, The refugee camps, Right of Return, The PLO, and the Resistance Movement
- **Lebanon:** The Civil War and the Israeli invasion
- **The Arab World:**

  The Arab-Israeli conflict,

  The Arab regressive regimes, and

  Western intervention in Arab affairs



This bullet refused to be fired against the refugee camps, or participate in the internal Palestinian fighting, or in Lebanon's civil war, or in the Gulf war* [Iraq and Iran]*; this bullet is wanted by all other rifles as a suspect of terrorism



The Subjects of the Cartoons:

Social Justice in the Arab World:

- Absence of Democracy and Freedom of Expression
- The gap between the wealthy & the poor
- Human Rights issues
- Unemployment
- Lack of opportunities



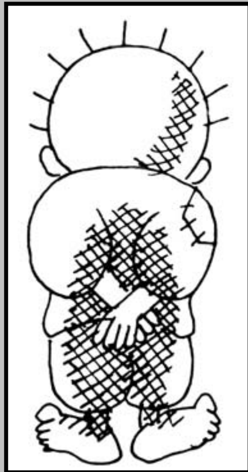
Brother Peter is a Coptic Christian.

They accused him of being a member of a secret organization.

After they tortured him, he confessed of being a member of the Muslims brotherhood!!



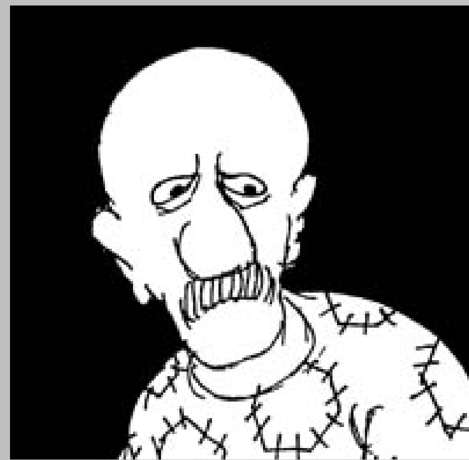
Main Characters:



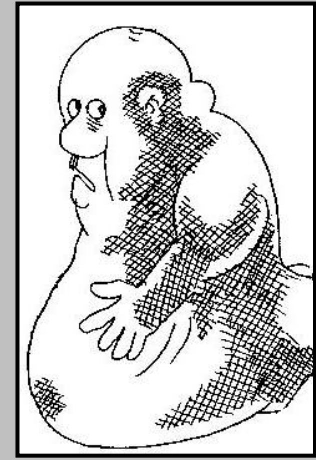
Handala



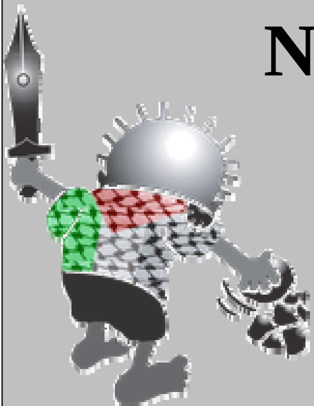
Fatima



The Good Man



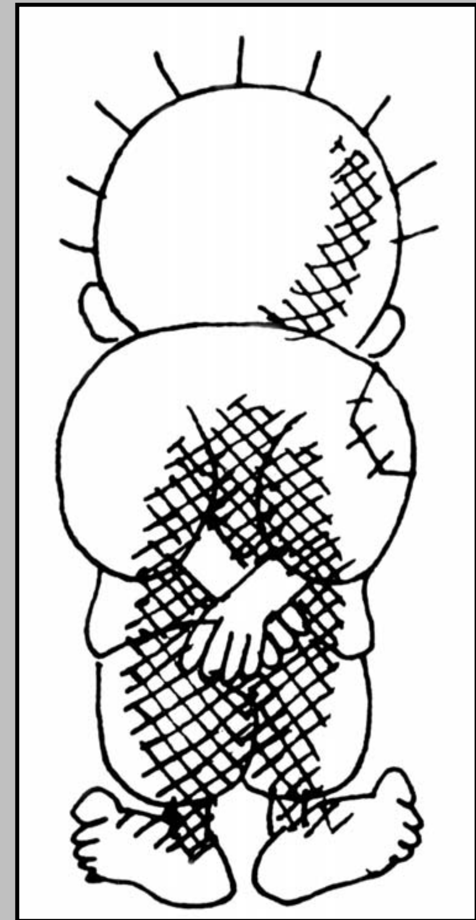
The Evil man



Naji al-Ali created his own cast of characters and he stayed away from portraying real characters, as do most cartoonists

Handala: A Character & Icon

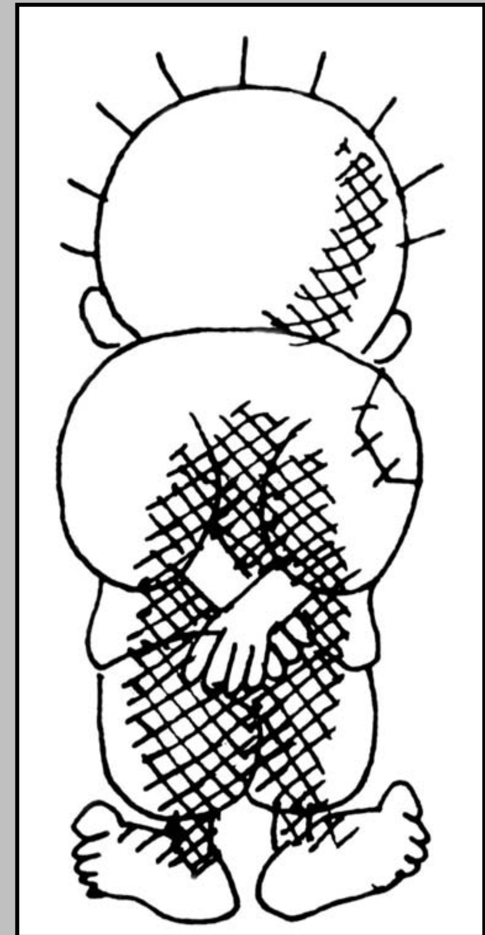
- Born in 1969 at the age of 10 years, will start growing up when he returns to Palestine
- His Name derived from bitterness
- His hair like a hedgehog
- Barefooted like the children of the refugee camps
- Did not show his face after 1973 and he will show it when *"Arab dignity is restored and Palestine returns "*





Handala: A Character & Icon

- A symbolic representation of Naji, frozen in age.
- Served as his signature
- A spectator not agreeing to what is happening around him.
- A witness, and an active participant, always standing next to the good characters.





Handala: First Introduction



عزيزي القارئ:

اسمح لي اقدم لك نفسي .. انا واعوذ بالله من كلمة انا، اسمي حنظله .. اسم ابوي مش ضروري .. امي اسمها نكبه واختي الصغيره

.. نمرة رجلي مابعرف لاني دايماً حافي .. ولدت في ٥ حزيران ٦٧ .. جنسيتي - انا مش فلسطيني مش اردني مش كويتي مش لبناني مش مصري

مش حدا .. الخ .. باختصار معيش هويه ولا ناوي اتجنس .. محسوبك انسان عربي وبس .... التقيت صدفه بالرسام ناجي .. كان

شغله لانه مش عارف يرسم .. وشرح لي السبب .. وكيف كل ما رسم عن بلد - السفارة بتحتج - والارشاد والانباء بتنذر ... بيرسم عن

علقتله شرحه .. قللي الناس كلها اوادم .. صارو ملايكه .. والامور مفيش احسن من هيك .. وبهالحاله عن شو بدي ارسم وكيف

اعيش ... وناوي يشوف شغله غير هالشغله .. قلتله انت شخص جبان وبتهرب من المعركه .. وقسيت عليه بالكلام ... وبعدين طيبت

خاطرو .. وعرفته على نفسي واني انسان عربي واعي .. بعرف كل اللغات وبحكي بكل اللهجات معاشر كل الناس المليح والعاطل الآدمي والازعر

كل البتاع ... اللي بيشتغلو مزبوط واللي هيك وهيك .. ورحت الاغوار وبعرف مين بيقاتل ومين بيطلع بلاغات بس ..

وقلتله اني مستعد ارسم عنه الكاريكاتير كل يوم وفهمته اني ما بخاف من حدا غير الله واللي بدو يزعل يروح يبلط البحر .. واني رايح احكي

عن اللي بيفكروا بالكنديشن والسياره وشو يطبخوا اكثر من ما بفكروا بفلسطين .. عزيزي القارئ، انا آسف لاني طولت عليك بالحكي

.. وما تظن اني تعديت هالشي عشان اعبي هالمساحه .. واني بالاصاله عن نفسي وبالنيابه عن صديقي الرسام اشكرك على طولة بالك

.. وبس .. والى اللقاء غداً وبتاع ...

حنظله

Name: ***Handala***

Father’s name: ***not important***

Mother’s name: ***Nakbah***

Size of his shoes: ***does not know***

because he is always barefooted.

Date of Birth: ***June 5th, 1967***

at the age of 10 years old

Nationality: ***Simply an Arab person.***

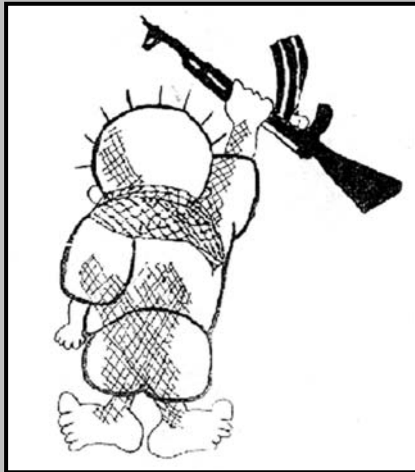
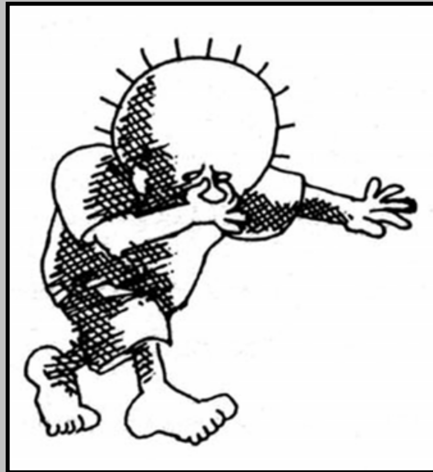
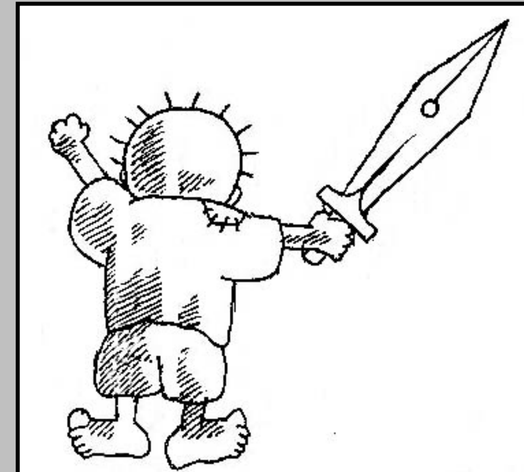
Experience & Education:

An Educated Arab person who knows all languages and dialects,

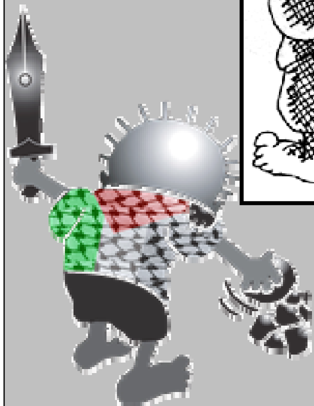
knows all types of people: the good, the bad and the ugly,

went to the battlefields and knows who fights and who just talks.





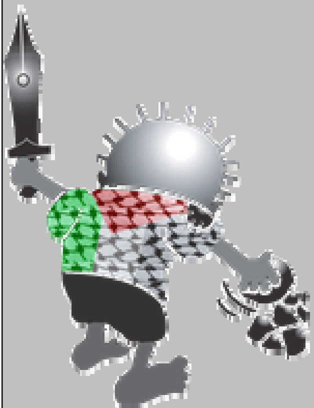



The Roles of Handala

Handala: As a Witness



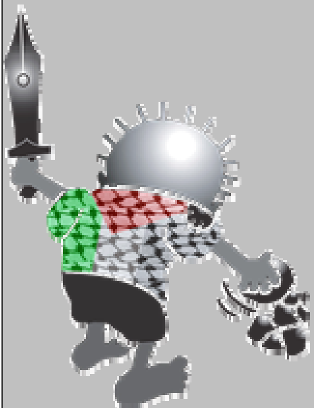
Tombstone: I think, therefore I exist



Handala: An Active Character



No to Autonomy !



Handala: An Outspoken



Newspaper tile: The Anniversary of the Battle of Hittin
- The Good Man: What if Saladin is still alive?
- Handala: They would have assassinated him.



What al-Ali said about Handala:

- *"my icon which safe guards my sole from committing mistakes"*
- *"a witness to my childhood"*
- *"Handala was born 10 years old and he will always be 10 years old. It was at that age I left my homeland. When he returns, Handala will still be ten, and then he will start growing up."*
- *" I drew him as a child who is not beautiful; his hair is the hair of the hedgehog who uses his thorns as weapons."*
- *"Handala is not a fat, happy, relaxed or pampered child. He is barefooted like the children of the refugee camp."*
- *"At first he was a Palestinian child, but his consciousness developed to have a national (Arab), and then a global and human horizon."*

Naji Al-Ali in various interviews



Fatima: The Mother & The Land

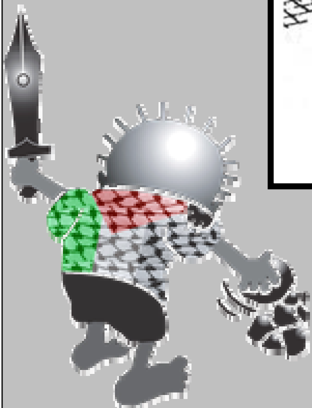


- Drawn with simple & sharp lines
- Has beautiful features
- Always carrying the house key
- Her roots in the land of Palestine
- She is the dedicated wife, the primal mother figure, the refugee, the suffering woman, and the protector
- Symbolizes Palestine in her dress and actions
- Side by side with the man and a major part of the struggle for freedom and democracy



Fatima: Part of the Struggle

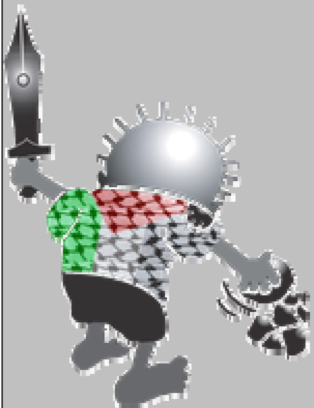
With deep roots



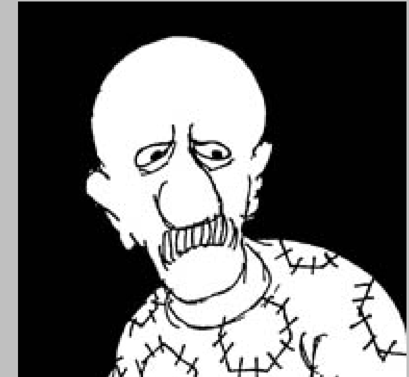
Fatima: Part of the Struggle



and a woman of unity

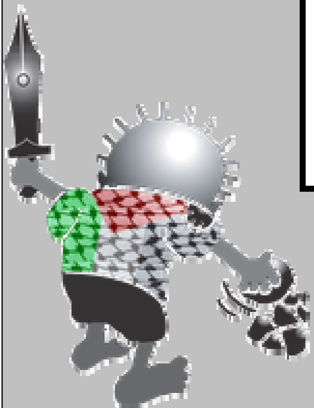


The Good Man: The Ordinary Man



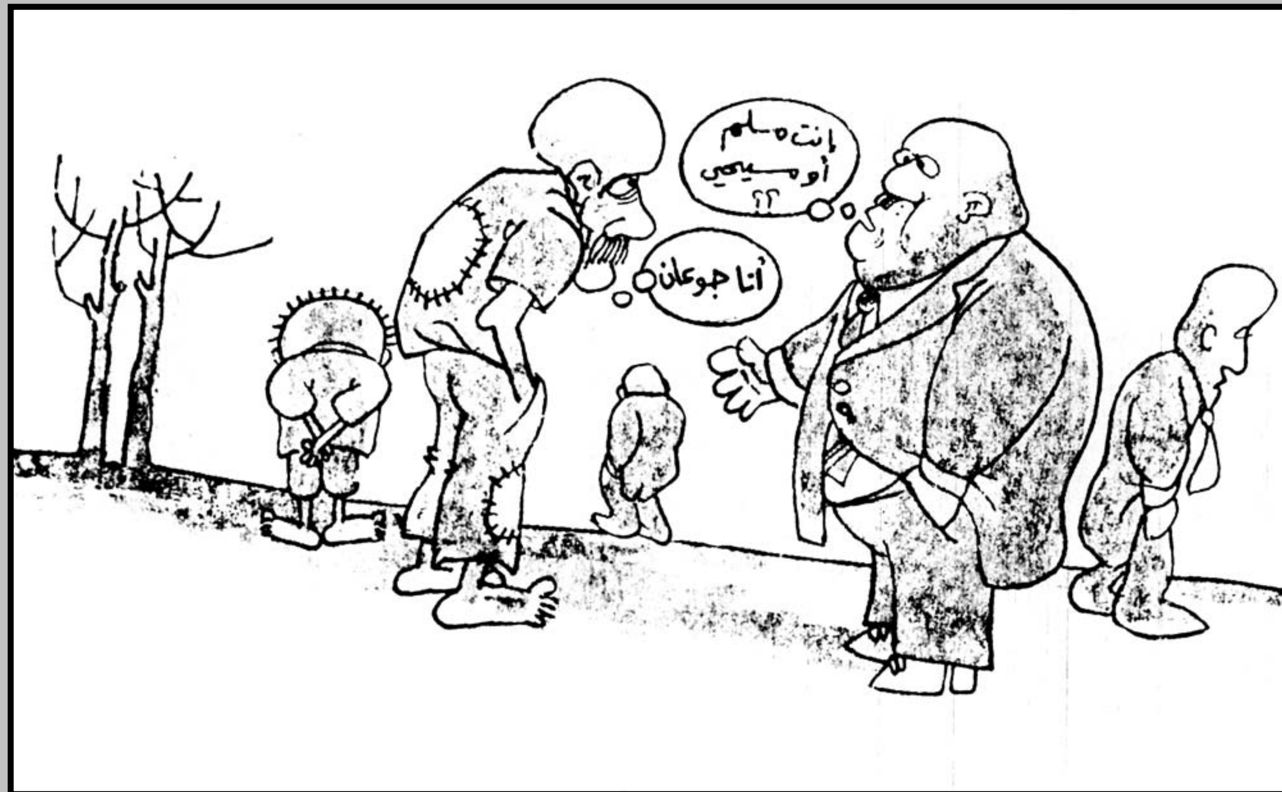
- The ordinary Arab Man *"Zalama"*
- Honest and a good person
- Drawn with simple & sharp lines
- Standing tall with beautiful features
- He is thin representing the poor and the oppressed
- A freedom fighter and a refugee
- A Palestinian and an Arab man
- A Muslim and a Christian





The Freedom Fighter's choice

The Good Man: The Ordinary Arab Man

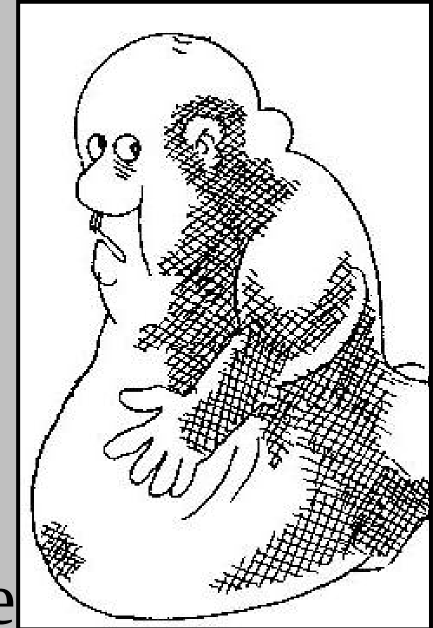




From right to left: Fat man: are you a Muslim or a Christian..

Good Man: I am hungry!

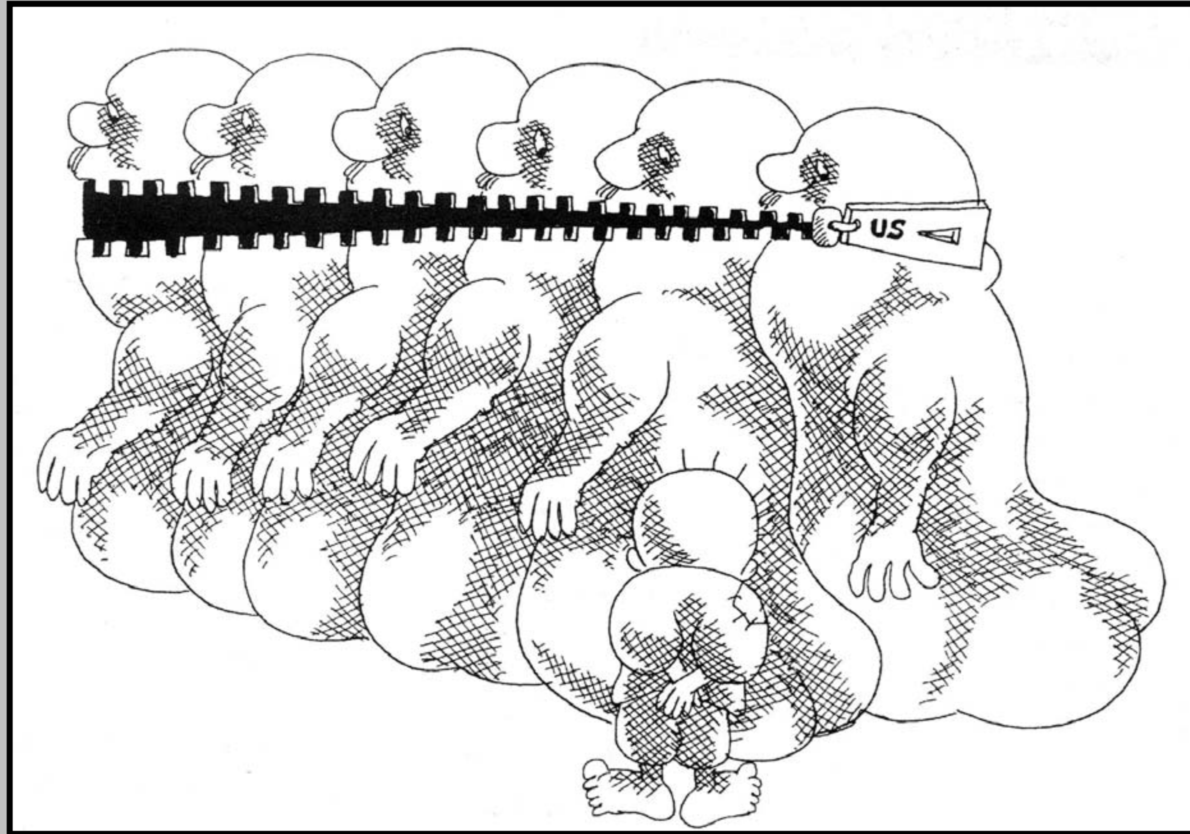
The Evil Man: The Oppressor



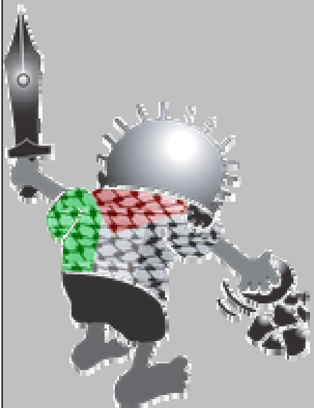
- A Moron with no aesthetic features
- Ugly and overweight as a bag of fat
- Lazy and dirty in his looks and actions
- Has no legs – no popular support
- Represents evil, bad, oppression
- Betrays and plots against the resistance
- Benefits from and takes advantage of the resistance
- A tool in the hands of Israel & the West



The Evil Man: The Arab Regimes



A tool in the hands of the U.S.



The Evil Man: The Establishment

From right to left

Evil 1: you are accused of spoiling the relations between us and America

Evil 2: Don’t you know that any attack on Israel is an attack on us.. Answer?

Evil 3: Don’t bother with him.. Yesterday, I accused him of the same thing; I didn't like his answer, so I cut his tongue!!



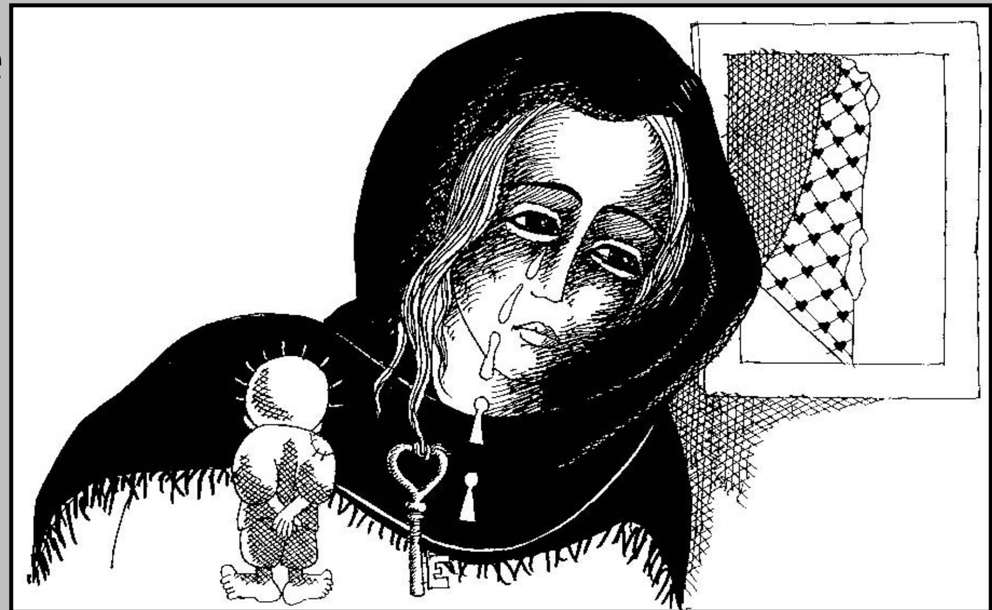
The Establishment



Symbols in al-Ali’s Cartoons

1- Symbols of Palestinian Struggle:

- **Jesus & the Cross**
- **House Key: Right of Return, Land, Palestine**
- **Embroidery & Folklore**
- **Flags, *Kufiyyah***
- **Palestine map**
- **Rocks**
- **Tents & Refugee camps**

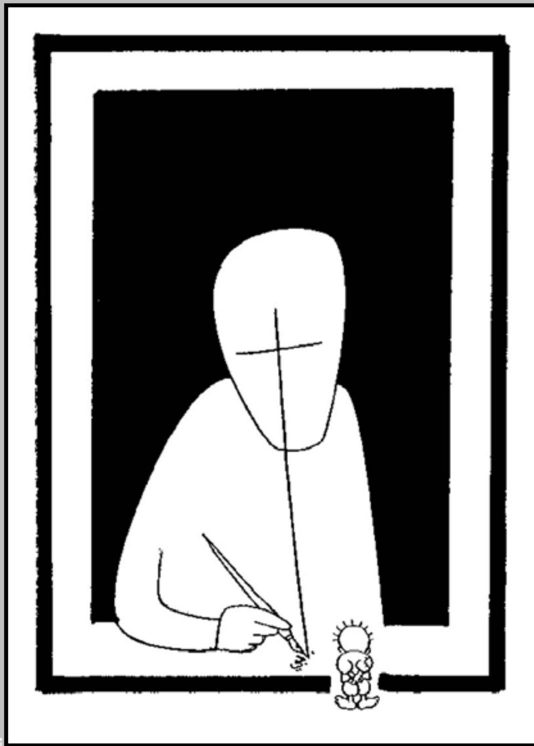


Fatima & The House Key

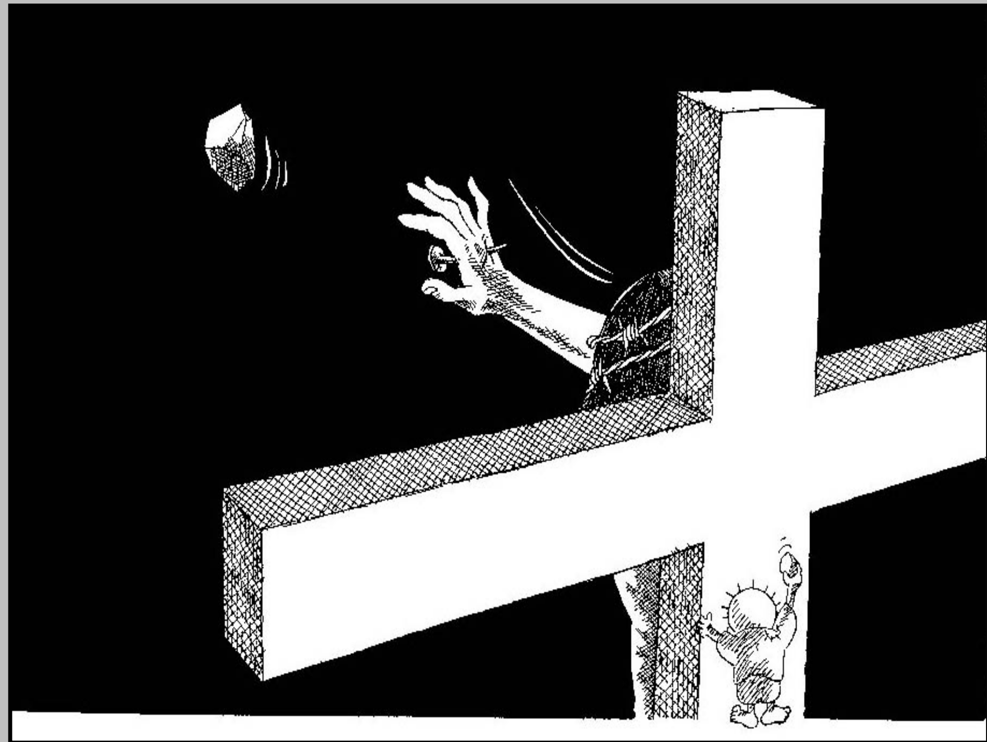


Symbols in al-Ali's Cartoons: The Cross

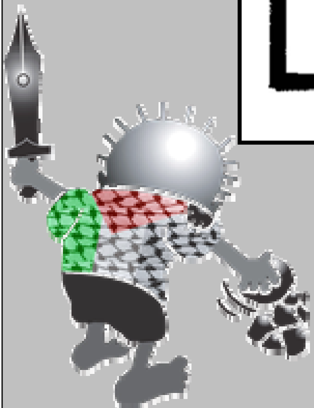
a symbol of struggle and sacrifice



a self portrait



Jesus fights back



Symbols in al-Ali's Cartoons: The Cross

a symbol of struggle and sacrifice





Freedom Fighter:
We missed you Beirut.



Freedom Fighter leaves Beirut

Symbols in al-Ali's Cartoons

2- Symbols of Good Values:



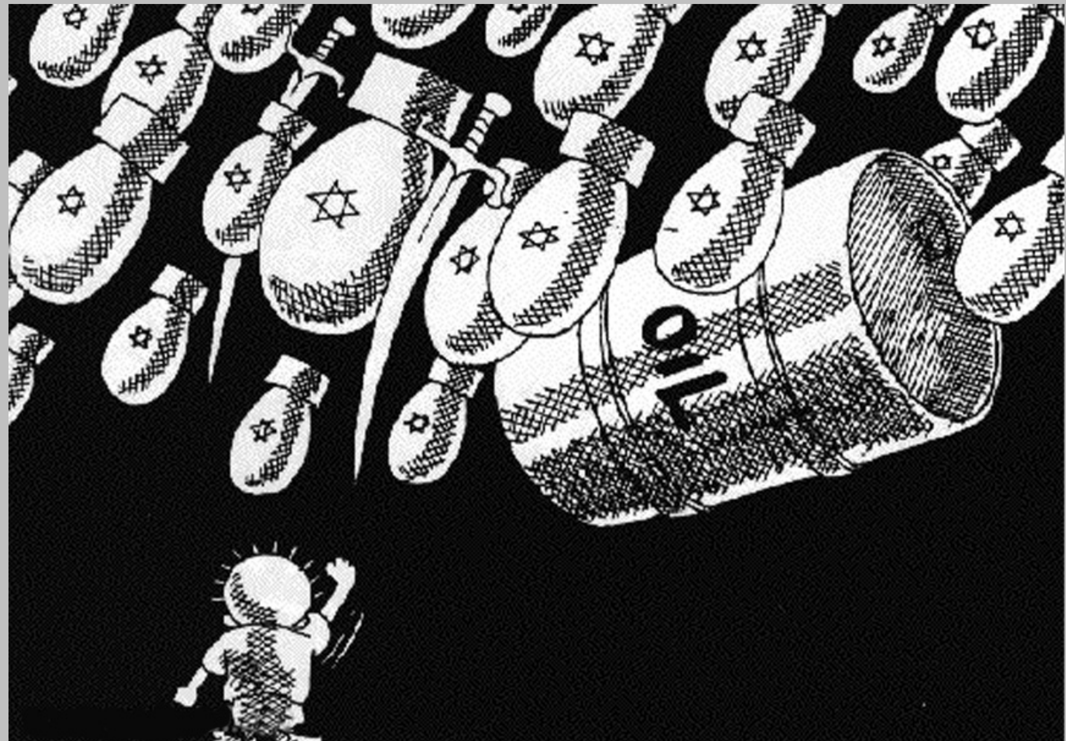
- **Flowers & the daisy: hope, peace & love**
- **Trees, roots, cedars: the land, and prosperity**
- **Candles: hope, peace**
- **Pens: hope, democracy, and freedom of expression**
- **Heart: love for Palestine & Lebanon**



Symbols in al-Ali's Cartoons

3- Symbols of Oppression & Occupation:

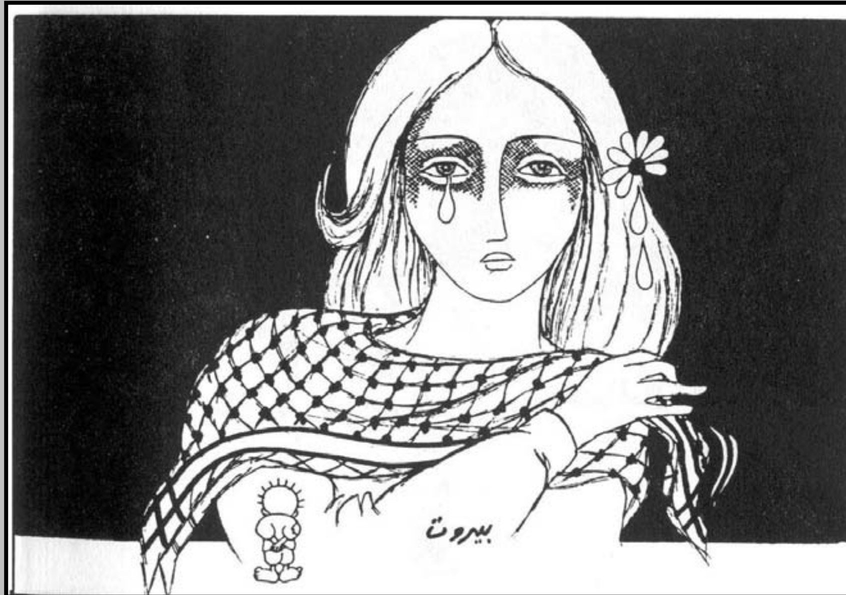
- **Zionism & Israel**
- **Weapons**
- **Soldiers**
- **Barbed wires**
- **Wars**
- **Camp David & 242**
- **Oil Barrels**



Handala as a Resilient Boy



Symbols in al-Ali’s Cartoons





Symbols of multiple use:

The Palestinian Head Scarf- *Kufiyyah*



A Palestinian identity when worn by a fighter, a way to benefit from the cause when worn by an evil character, and a symbol of love when worn by the lady Beirut.

Text in al-Ali’s Cartoons:





Over half of Naji’s Cartoons did not contain any text.

They were very simple to understand.

Text in al-Ali's Cartoons:

- **Comments from the artist requesting action**
- **Comments from a character – Handala making a point**
- **Dialogue between the characters**
- **Place identity/ Label**
- **Graphic Element**



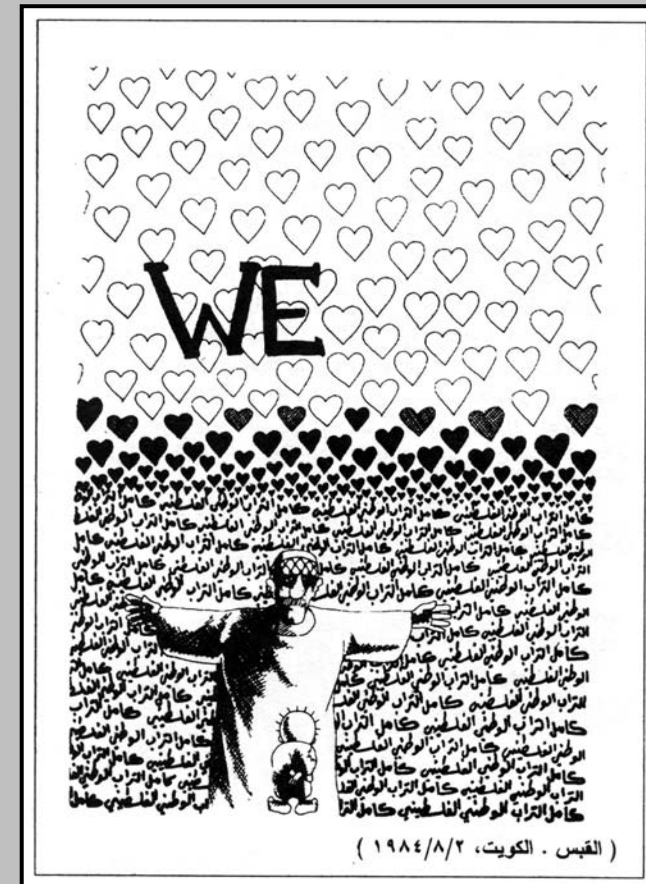
Dead person: No to the Silencer



Text in al-Ali's Cartoons



Interview with the Press



We love all of Palestine



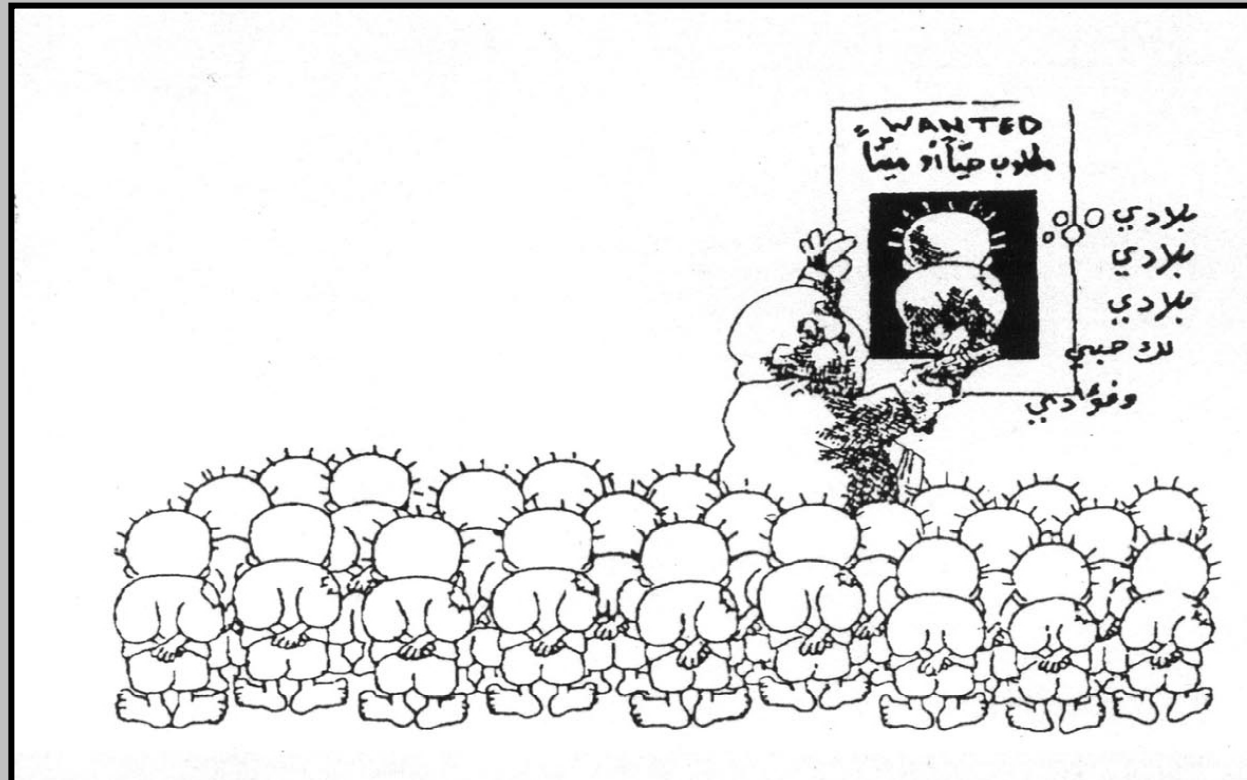
Text in al-Ali's Cartoons



-The chicken has a home,
its home is called a coop
-The rabbit has a home,
its home is called a hutch
-The horse has a home,
its home is called a stable
-The Phalanges who slaughtered our children in the camps have a home,
their home is called the "House of the Phalanges."
-America which helps Israel has a home, its home is called the "White House"
- The Palestinian lives in a refugee camp and does not have a home,
The Palestinian home is called a Holy House (bayt al-maqdis)
How a Palestinian can return home?
With awareness… and …, and ….

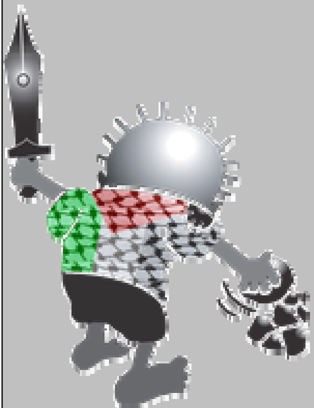


Al-Ali Predicting His Own Death

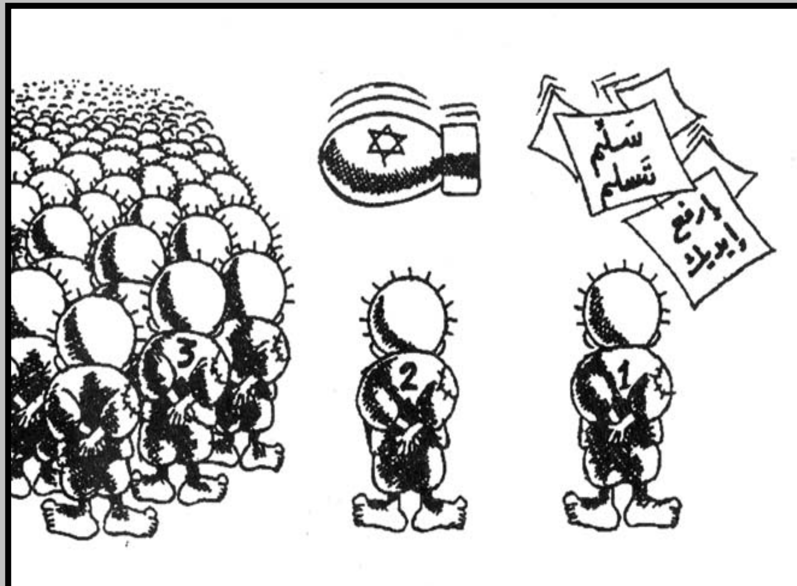


Published 2 weeks before his assassination.

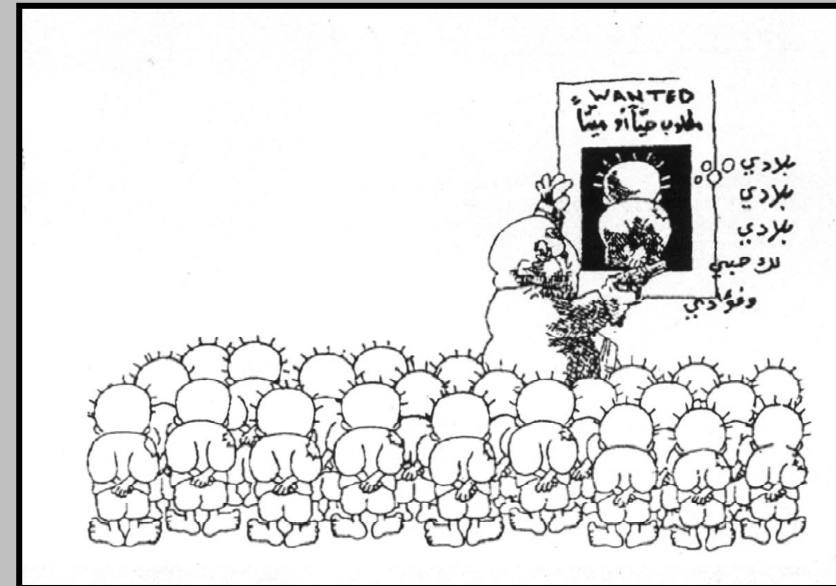
Poster: Wanted Dead or alive
Handala Singing: oh my homeland, oh my homeland
for you is my love and my heart



Who Assassinated Naji al-Ali?



Leaflets: Hands up! Surrender and you will be spared



Wanted Dead or Alive



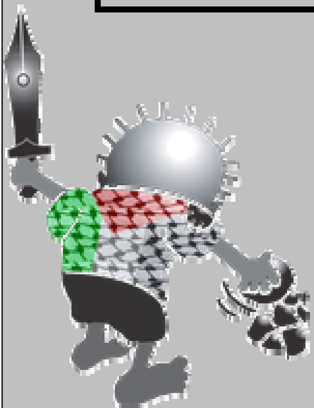
Forces that were trying to harm Handala. One suggests the evil man and what he represented, and the other one suggests the Israeli occupation.

Handala survives the Assassination and becomes a symbol of Palestinian struggle and the right of return.

"This character was born to survive... "

"I will continue within him even after I die."

Naji al-Ali



Handala is still alive!

Handala in a demonstration in San Francisco, 2004

